

**COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM
FY 2006-2007 PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK for:**

Project No.: PIP 12L

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT – NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT

Lead Agency: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Program Director's Office)

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Category:

Expected Funding

Source:

- ☐ Ongoing project
- ☒ Ongoing-revised project
- ☐ Requested new project
- ☐ Unsolicited proposal

- ☒ Annual funds
- ☐ Capital funds
- ☐ Other (explain)

I. Title of Proposal: Communications/Public Involvement Plan for Nonnative Fish Management

II. Background

Situation

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative partnership involving Federal and State agencies, environmental groups and water and power user organizations in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. Its purpose is to recover the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow, and razorback sucker, while water development proceeds in accordance with Federal and State laws. The Recovery Program's goal is to recover and delist the endangered fishes by restoring and establishing self-sustaining populations and protecting and providing sufficient habitat to support them.

The Recovery Program has five program elements: Habitat Management; Habitat Development; Native Fish Propagation and Stocking; Nonnative Fish Management; and Research, Monitoring, and Data Management.

Situation (Continued)

This communication plan addresses Nonnative Fish Management. This element includes actions the Recovery Program implements to identify the levels of management needed to minimize or remove the threat of nonnative fish and to implement the identified levels of nonnative fish management so as to enable and facilitate the goal of achieving recovery of the endangered fish species.

There are more than 40 nonnative fish species in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Negative interactions with certain warmwater nonnative fish species have contributed to declines in endangered and other native fish populations. Some nonnative fish prey upon endangered and other native fishes — eating their eggs and young, and in some cases, larger fish. Nonnative fish also compete with native fish for food and space. The nonnative fishes of greatest concern to the Recovery Program are smallmouth bass, channel catfish, and northern pike. Scientific evidence and data corroborate these species pose a significant threat to the endangered fishes.

Prior to 2003, the Recovery Program focused most of its public involvement efforts on other program elements. Earlier experimental efforts to manage nonnative fish primarily involved removal and relocation of northern pike in the Yampa River. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources had also removed limited numbers of nonnative fish.

In 2003 and 2004, the Recovery Program expanded efforts to identify management actions to minimize or remove the threat of nonnative fishes to survival of the endangered fishes as described in the recovery goals. From late April through October, biologists worked in sections of river in Colorado and Utah to experimentally manage the targeted species. Where appropriate and practical, biologists transferred fish from the river to local ponds and reservoirs that were publicly accessible to anglers.

Both years, the Recovery Program prepared and implemented a comprehensive communications plan to raise public awareness of the purpose of nonnative fish management. Efforts included developing informational materials and posting them on the Recovery Program's public web site; informing members of Congress and other elected officials; and proactively seeking news media coverage, including inviting reporters to accompany biologists as they conducted their work. In 2003, public meetings were held in Grand Junction, Steamboat Springs and Craig, Colorado. Public meetings were not held in 2004 because the nature of the planned work did not change from the previous year. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources developed and implemented its own communication plan to support the Recovery Program's communication efforts. The plan included presentations at Regional Advisory Council meetings in Green River and Vernal, Utah.

In FY 2004, Recovery Program partners adopted a nonnative fish management policy that addresses the process of identifying and implementing nonnative fish management actions needed to recover the endangered fish. The policy provides a consistent message that can be used

Situation (Continued)

as part of a strategic communications effort to gain agency and public understanding and support for these actions.

Based on research findings from 2004, nonnative fish management actions that will occur in 2005 include:

- Continuing efforts to identify sources of problematic nonnative fishes moving into critical habitat.
- Increasing efforts to manage northern pike in the Yampa River. Past efforts in the Gunnison, Colorado and Green rivers, however, demonstrated success in reducing northern pike. This work will continue in 2005.
- Continuing to target rapidly rising numbers of smallmouth bass in certain river reaches in Colorado and Utah. This proactive approach is needed to prevent populations from increasing to levels that may become unmanageable.
- Continuing channel catfish removal in Yampa Canyon where management actions have demonstrated success.
- Postponing channel catfish removal/relocation in the Colorado and Green rivers until specific research can occur to identify more effective management methods.
- Initiating a native and endangered fish response study in the Green River.

The Recovery Program continues to consider other nonnative fish management options which include screening reservoir outlets, berming ponds to prevent nonnative fishes from escaping into the rivers, developing agreements to regulate stocking of nonnative fishes, and changing state bag and possession limits.

Biologists believe that nonnative fish management actions taken to benefit the endangered fishes also will benefit other native fish species such as the roundtail chub, bluehead and flannelmouth sucker, and speckled dace.

Mission

To support the Recovery Program's success in recovering the endangered fishes while water development continues by assuring that the public understands what is being done and why relative to nonnative fish management, and has confidence that the process is driven by science and is clear, open, and honest.

Goals

- Educate target audiences about the endangered fishes and the threats to their survival, emphasizing the impacts from nonnative fishes.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with communities in the affected river basins.
- Increase understanding of, and support for, the management actions the Recovery Program is taking to reduce the threats to endangered fishes from nonnative fishes.
- Improve communication among agencies conducting nonnative fish management actions.
- Ensure that all participating agencies use the same message to convey the purpose of their actions related to nonnative fish management.

Target Audiences

- Landowners Adjacent to Rivers
- News Media
- Anglers
- Local Sportfishing Groups
- Rafting and Fishing Guides
- Elected Officials at All Levels
- Agency Line Staff and Volunteers
- Recovery Program Partners
- General Public

III. Strategies/Dates

To achieve success, it is imperative that this plan be considered “a work in progress,” with the flexibility to update as necessary to seize opportunities as they arise.

- 1. MAINTAIN ACTION PLANNING TEAMS.** The magnitude of this plan requires clear planning and direction from those with the authority and responsibility to implement recovery actions. Three communication teams have been established -- two for Colorado and one for Utah. Team members are asked to review the communication plan and associated educational materials in draft. They are also asked to provide feedback on what they hear related to this project in their respective communities and how outreach efforts can be improved.

Strategies/Dates (continued)

In Colorado, teams were established for both the Yampa and Colorado rivers in recognition of different communication needs for each river basin. Team members include:

- Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW): area and district wildlife managers and aquatic biologists for the Yampa and Colorado River basins; chief of communications; principal investigators for the projects
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources: Dawn Taylor Owens, Colorado's I&E Committee representative and Colorado Division of Wildlife Public Information Specialist Randy Hampton
- State Park Managers (Yampa River/Elkhead Reservoir/Highline Lake)
- Yampa River Basin Partnership representative(s)
- Recovery Program: Debbie Felker, I&E Coordinator and Pat Nelson, Nonnative Fish Coordinator
- Fish and Wildlife Service and Colorado State University: Project leader and principal investigators
- Others whom the State of Colorado may want to include

Utah team members include:

- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR):
 1. Mark Hadley, media specialist and Chairman of the I&E Committee
 2. Conservation outreach (public affairs) managers and endangered fish and sportfish biologists and managers in the UDWR's Northeastern and Southeastern regions
 3. Aquatic program coordinators in the UDWR's administrative office in Salt Lake City
- Recovery Program: Debbie Felker, I&E Coordinator; Pat Nelson, Nonnative Fish Coordinator
- Fish and Wildlife Service: Project leader and principal investigators
- Others whom the State of Utah may want to include.

The purpose of these teams is to clearly define and implement strategies numbered 4-11, tailoring them to meet the needs of each particular community where work will occur.

RESPONSIBILITY: Program Director's Office; States of Colorado & Utah; FWS

COMPLETION DATE: Communication among team members is ongoing.

Strategies/Dates (continued)

2. **PROMOTE KEY MESSAGES AND NONNATIVE FISH MANAGEMENT POLICY.** Update key messages to ensure accuracy. Messages explain the purpose and goals of the Nonnative Fish Management program element with emphasis on research findings that clearly demonstrate the prevalence and negative effects of nonnative fish, and the benefits of relocating sportfish in Colorado and providing alternate, accessible fishing sites according to the State's aquatic management plan. Messages will be used by all Recovery Program partners and participating agencies. Approved messages help ensure that all agencies involved with nonnative fish management projects convey the same information to those with whom they come in contact.
RESPONSIBILITY: Program Director's Staff, I & E Committee, Participating agencies
COMPLETION DATE: Complete message review: April 1
Use key messages: ongoing.
3. **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, STATE AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS AND THEIR STAFFS.** Distribute news releases and other information materials. Proactively notify affected officials or staff by phone or in person if a significant issue arises in their district so they are not caught off guard by constituent comments. Offer briefings to elected officials, with emphasis on local and state legislators, district/state Congressional staff, county commissioners and local sheriffs. Briefing teams will vary depending on state/jurisdiction and nature of inquiry.
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator, Legislative Affairs Specialists from participating agencies (States of Colorado and Utah, FWS)
COMPLETION DATE: March/April to distribute news releases/other information; other communication ongoing as needed
4. **NEWS MEDIA.** Prepare and distribute advance and follow-up news releases to media, members of Congress, and Recovery Program partners. Call or visit key reporters to make sure they understand the issue and the work plans. Identify and seek support of a local organization(s) to issue releases or provide supportive statements (e.g., Yampa River Basin Partnership). Invite reporters to accompany biologists as they conduct their work.
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator and Action Planning Team(s)
COMPLETION DATE: March/April to distribute news releases and call/visit key reporters; ongoing communication with press as needed

Strategies/Dates (continued)

5. **LANDOWNER CONTACTS.** Identify and seek permission from landowners to access their property as part of recovery actions.
RESPONSIBILITY: Principal investigators
COMPLETION DATE: March
6. **ESTABLISH LOCAL SPOKESPERSON(S).** Identify key local spokespersons representing the Recovery Program, Colorado and Utah Divisions of Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who will respond to local news media inquiries, speak at public meetings and work with the I&E Coordinator to prepare appropriate information materials and identify issues/questions raised in the community that should be addressed.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing
7. **STAFF/VOLUNTEER TRAINING.** All staff and volunteers conducting the field work, as well as others who might receive questions from the public and congressional staff, will receive the key message and project-specific questions/answers in writing with verbal explanation from their project leader/supervisor. This will be incorporated into training that staff/volunteers receive about the work to be performed. Staff/volunteers should be clearly told that their agency is actively involved with, and supportive of, the project and is working in partnership with other organizations.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Team Members
COMPLETION DATE: At least two weeks before field work begins.
8. **ANGLER ROUNDTABLES/PUBLIC MEETINGS.** Public meetings will not be held in 2005 unless the nature of the work significantly changes from what the public has been told previously. CDOW does not plan to host angler roundtables in 2005. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources plans to make its annual presentation on this topic at select Regional Advisory Council meetings and may also ask Recovery Program staff to participate in these meetings.
RESPONSIBILITY: Appropriate agency contacts/I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: As needed
9. **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION.** Post news releases and questions/answers to Recovery Program and agency websites and the Yampa River Basin Partnership listserv.
RESPONSIBILITY: I&E Coordinator and Agencies
COMPLETION DATE: As soon as materials are developed. Update as needed.

Strategies/Dates (continued)

10. **FISHING AND RIVER GUIDES/SPORTING GOODS STORES.** Distribute news release(s) and questions/answers information to commercial fishing and rafting guides. Note: originally this strategy included distributing information to area sporting goods stores. In follow-up discussions with principal investigators and other CDOW, UDWR and FWS staff, it was decided not to target the sporting good stores in 2005 as this contact appears to “stir the pot” by raising the level of frustration among anglers who oppose this project.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: March/April
11. **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT/DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT BOAT PERMITS.** Work with BLM and NPS to prepare appropriate materials that explain this project for inclusion with boat permit distribution. (Note: because the deadline to accomplish this for 2005 field work was missed, an information card will be developed instead that will be provided to rangers with these agencies.)
RESPONSIBILITY: I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: December
12. **AGENCY PUBLICATIONS.** Publish an article(s) about this work in publications produced by participating agencies and/or Recovery Program partners. Provide information for local visitor guides and chambers of commerce.
RESPONSIBILITY: Action Planning Teams and I & E Coordinator
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing

Evaluation

- Document print and broadcast news media placements.
- Document the number of angler roundtables and/or public meetings held, including attendance numbers and general attitude of those who attend.
- Have project leader/supervisor ask work crews/volunteers for feedback on the questions/comments they received from people they met while conducting the work.
- Document the number of articles published in agency/partner publications.
- Document contacts made with members of Congress and their staffs and feedback received.
- Determine feasibility of implementing nonnative fish control in the Yampa River in light of results of landowner willingness to allow access and trespass to conduct control activities.
- Prepare an annual report to Recovery Program committees.

IV. Budget

The information and education coordinator's salary and travel expenses are covered in the Program Director's budget.

	<u>FY 2006</u>	<u>FY 2007</u>
Paid advertisements to announce public meetings*	\$ 0	\$3,000
Printing costs for educational materials**	<u>\$2,000</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>
TOTAL	\$2,000	\$5,000

*Public Meetings

If determined necessary, public meetings would be held in Grand Junction, Craig, and Steamboat Springs, Colorado. This budget is based upon placing two paid ads each in the daily newspapers in these communities (total of 6 ads) at an estimated cost of \$500 each.

**Printed educational materials:

1. Bookmark-size, laminated information card to be distributed to boaters. Black and white, two sides, card stock. Quantity: 1,000. Estimated cost: \$750.
2. Laminated fact sheets to distribute to river guides. (8 ½ X 11, black and white, two sides, text weight – 12 fact sheets, quantity 50 each. Estimated cost: \$980.
3. Laminated posters to place in kiosks at Yampa State Wildlife Area and Loudy-Simpson ponds (24 X 36, poster board, black and white, waterproof material. Quantity: 2. Estimated cost: \$270